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UNCLAS YEREVAN 000109

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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TAGS: PGOV PREL AM

SUBJECT: RUMORS TOUT ABRAHAMIAN TO LEAD NEW "SUPER-MINISTRY"

Sensitive but unclassified, please protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Galust Sahakian, Head of the National Assembly Republican Faction and close ally of Minister of Territorial Administration Hovik Abrahamian, revealed January 19 that Abrahamian will likely take over a new "super-ministry" taking shape within the GOAM. This new appointment would make Abrahamian, a close ally of President Robert Kocharian, a de facto Deputy Prime Minister, giving him broad controls over a variety of cross-cutting administrative fields. In addition to Abrahamian's current role overseeing local administration, he would also take charge of three other state departments including water resources, emergency management and migration and refugees. The GOAM has not yet made an official announcement regarding the new ministry but we expect one within the next few weeks.

¶2. (SBU) No stranger to controversy, Abrahamian (commonly referred to by his nickname "Muk," or "Mouse," referring to his slight stature) was repeatedly accused of extensive vote rigging in favor of Kocharian and his Republican Party during both the 1998 and 2003 elections. Some analysts suggest that as the new "Super-Minister," he would serve as a loyal counterweight to Prime Minister Andranik Margarian and, to a lesser degree, Chief of Staff Manouk Topouzian.

COMMENT: KOCHARIAN MAINTAINS BALANCE OF POWER

¶3. (SBU) We believe that this fits into Kocharian's overall goal of maintaining a delicate balance of loyal power players within the government and, in effect, ensuring that no single figure (in this case Margarian or Topouzian) has too much power within the GOAM. Abrahamian is, in his own right, a high-ranking figure with a genuine local power base. One of the most prominent opposition leaders and former member of the Republican Party, Victor Dallakian, noted that Kocharian trusts Abrahamian more than he does the Prime Minister himself.

EVANS